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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the socioeconomic status (SES) of listeners of all-news radio. Subjects, 102 females and 98 males in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, responded to a 12-statement questionnaire in a telephone survey. Although previous studies suggested that listeners of low SES regarded radio primarily as a source of entertainment, the results of this study indicated that listeners of low SES view all-news radio as a source of both information and entertainment. One theory regarding this conclusion is that listening to the radio does not require the expenditure of intellectual effort or money and is therefore easily accessible to persons of low SES. (DF)

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Listeners' Socioeconomic Status and the Uses of All-News Radio

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ABSTRACT

Listeners' Socioeconomic Status
and the Uses of All-News Radio

This study's telephone survey of a representative sample found that all-news listeners of relatively low socioeconomic status are highly committed to newsradio for both information and entertainment because listening demands fairly little intellectual effort or expense.

Listeners' Socioeconomic Status and the Uses of All-News Radio

A number of studies indicate that persons of relatively high socioeconomic status (SES) tend to use media news informationally while the lower SES audience seems to regard news as entertainment. This exploratory probe suggests that these associations may not hold for all news radio listeners.

Schramm and White observed that "informational"[1] newspaper readers who sought delayed reward news tended to be older, better educated and more prosperous. Schramm's finding of a positive correlation between radio listeners' educational levels and preference for delayed reward news[2] suggests that associations of demographics and functions established for newspaper readers hold for audiences of electronic media news as well. Others have reported similar results. Rees for example found a positive correlation for males between achievement motivation (a "soft" indicator of SES) and preference for delayed reward magazine and television content.[3] In sum, high SES individuals have been regarded as a primary audience for news: "The . . . evidence is that as people get more education, move into white-collar jobs, [and] earn more money, . . . they develop a greater appetite for news"[4] and they tend to regard news as information rather than entertainment.

Many all-news radio listeners do not seem to be such high SES informationally-oriented persons. The Associated Press has reported that all-news radio has substantial appeal for persons of low as well as high SES (though not so much for middle-level SES individuals).[5] Newsradio personnel are aware that many listeners are members of ethnic minorities (most Blacks in Philadelphia,[6] for example; both Blacks and Hispanics in New York [7]) who may be of relatively low SES. A KYW Newsradio (Philadelphia) staffer has suggested a reason for this: "All-news listening is "not a literate process."[8] If newsradio encourages

news exposure and even fosters an informational attitude in low SES individuals because listening requires relatively little effort, then it may be an especially important channel for disseminating public information.

Since this study was frankly exploratory it is framed by research questions rather than formal hypotheses:

1. What are listeners' functional orientations to all-news radio?
2. In particular, can expected associations between high SES and informational functions, and between low SES and entertainment functions, be identified for newsradio listeners?

Methods

Subjects

Data on SES and functional orientations were collected in a telephone survey (N=200) of KYW Newsradio (Philadelphia) listeners using random digit dialing techniques. Only numbers for the Philadelphia metropolitan area were called. Listeners in outlying areas and in the adjacent states of New Jersey and Delaware were excluded. Respondents were required to be regular newsradio listeners (i.e., to listen on at least two days per week with coverage of professional baseball excluded). One respondent--at least 18 years old--from a household was interviewed. A procedure was used to obtain a male-female mix representative of the 52.7%:47.3% proportions of the audience as a whole[9] without violating the random nature of the sample. Interviewers were instructed at times to ask for males or females, but if these were not available they were required to accept eligible subjects as the "wrong" sex.

Instrumentation

Variables were operationalized as questionnaire items presented in the telephone survey. Independent variables include age, race, occupation and

educational level. The questionnaire's 12 function statements (Table 1) reflect eight functions which represent informational and entertainment orientations. Informational functions include learning, personal assertion and social utility. The entertainment functions are companionship, escape, excitement, habit and relaxation. These functions and the questionnaire items which represent them were selected from review of a large number of functional analyses of media use.[10] A pretest with open-ended questions as well as the function statements on a convenience sample of 53 university students resulted in some refinements, such as the addition of the "to get news quickly" aspect of the learning function.

Table 1 about here

Subjects respond to the function items in terms of a 9-point scale. To control for response bias, half of the sample (N=200) received questionnaires in which "1" indicated greatest disagreement and "9" indicated greatest agreement, while the other half used questionnaires in which the meanings of the scale points were reversed. The two forms of the questionnaire were randomly distributed among the survey's four interviewers. The scales were reconciled for data and analysis.

Procedures

Interviewers were given the entire content of the interview as a written text and were trained to present it in a standardized way. Four interviewers (1 male, 3 female; 2 White, 2 Black) made calls July 7-14, 1979. Twenty-eight of the 281 Philadelphia suburban telephone exchanges in use were randomly selected. Exchanges, each of which gave access to about 8000 subscribers,[11] were paired with random numbers. Unanswered and busy numbers were called back three times.

Data Analysis

SPSS computer routines yielded an R-type factor analysis (PA2, Varimax rotation) of the function items. Factor-based scale scores[12] were created by averaging each subject's scores on the items which load on each factor. These factor-composite scores were used as dependent variables to examine associations between functional orientations and SES. Age and occupational socioeconomic status scores,[13] as independent variables, were split at their medians; race and educational level were dichotomized as Black-White and grade school/high school-college/graduate school.

Functional differences within demographic categories were examined as an exploratory first step in delineating all-news radio subaudiences. One-tailed t-tests of mean differences were employed and significance was assessed at the .05 level. Pooled variance estimates were used except as noted.

Reliability

Retest reliability was assessed by making a second round of calls to 20 subjects (10.0% of the sample) one week after their initial interviews. The same function items were presented, and original and retest responses were correlated for consistency. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the 12 function items taken together was .85. Retest reliability was judged satisfactory.

Results

The Sample

One hundred and two (51.0%) of the 200 subjects obtained were male and 98 (49.0%) were female, a mix close to that of the KYW audience as a whole.[14] Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 92 years. The mean age was 44.3 years. One

hundred and forty-five subjects (72.5%) were Whites and 53 (26.5%) were Blacks. (Two cases [1.0%] did not report race.) Ninety-eight subjects (49.0%) with no more than a high school education were considered less well-educated. Ninety-nine better-educated subjects (49.5%) had at least some college experience. (Three cases [1.5%] did not report education.)

One hundred and sixty-nine subjects (84.5%) could be rated on the U.S. Census Bureau's occupational SES scale. (Twenty-four were retired persons who were rated by their occupation when they had worked.) Their scores ranged from 11 (e.g., janitors, domestics) to 99 (e.g., dentists, professors). Since sociologists generally regard such ratings as interval data,[15] summary statistics were calculated. The mean occupational SES score was 73.3 and the median was 79.0 (e.g., electricians, policemen).

The Functions of Newsradio

The function factors of Table 1 are named to indicate their informational or entertainment character and to suggest the common theme of their elements. Table 1 also shows subjects' mean endorsements of the individual function items. Three factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. To explore the factor structure of the functions, loadings of .30 or greater were accepted. The order of the factors indicates that there is more variability in listeners' use of newsradio for entertainment than for information.

SES and Functional Orientations

Older listeners use newsradio more than do younger persons for the functions of the entertainment ($t=-3.77$, $df=196$, $p<.001$) and informational-social ($t=2.19$, $df=196$, $p<.025$) factor-composites. Listeners who rank low in occupational SES use all-news radio more for entertainment functions ($t=3.24$, $df=167$, $p<.001$). Blacks listen more than do Whites to fulfill both entertainment ($t=3.02$, $df=196$,

$p<.001$) and informational-personal ($t=2.30$, $df=119.75$ [separate variance estimate], $p<.025$) motives. Less-educated persons use newsradio more than do the better-educated to serve all functions: entertainment ($t=5.49$, $df=195$, $p<.001$), informational-social ($t=2.10$, $df=195$, $p<.025$) and informational-personal ($t=2.21$, $df=176.29$ [separate variance estimate], $p<.025$).

Discussion

The findings that listeners of low occupational SES and Blacks, who may rank generally lower in SES than Whites, use newsradio more for entertainment are consonant with the established concensus about SES and functional orientations to media news. But the inverse relationship of educational level and the use of newsradio for information as well as entertainment is unexpected, as in Black's greater use of newsradio for informational-personal reasons.

(The findings on age and newsradio use are ambiguous. Age may bear a direct relation to SES, since younger persons may not be so well-established professionally, or an inverse relation, since older individuals may have entered the work force with less professional training and earning power than younger persons have enjoyed in more recent times.)

Low SES persons' newsradio use does not seem to be function-specific. This suggests that some quality of the channel itself appeals to them.[16] The insight quoted above of a KYW staffer--that all-news listening is "not a literate process"--is provocative. McEwen and Hempel recognized such an influence on media use in citing "level of effort"[17] as a determinant of exposure. Martin, McNelly and Izcaray put this idea in terms that bear directly on this study's findings: In a stratified socioeconomic setting, for those of less affluent life styles, "the [media] exposure pattern . . . [is] ordered by the 'cost,' both monetary and intellectual, of consumption of the different media."[18]

The generally accepted understanding of SES and news use holds that persons of various SES levels tend to have distinctive uses for, and interests in, media news. This study's findings suggest that operation of an intervening variable--the monetary and especially the intellectual costs of attending to media channels. Buying the newspaper is a daily expense and effort; radio is ready-to-hand. Reading for information, particularly serious delayed reward news, requires literacy and concentration which low SES persons may find uncongenial. But when offered news and information programming exclusively on the easily accessible all-news radio channel low SES persons tend to become a highly committed, information-oriented as well as entertainment-oriented audience. It would be interesting to see if specialized cable news services, video counterparts to newsradio, have similar appeal.

Notes

1. W. Schramm and D. White, "Age, Education, Economic Status: Factors in Newspaper Reading," Journalism Quarterly 26 (1949):153.

2. W. Schramm, "The Nature of News," Journalism Quarterly 26 (1949):259-269.

3. M. Rees, "Achievement Motivation and Content Preferences," Journalism Quarterly 44 (1967):688-692.

4. B. Bagdikian, The Information Machines: Their Impact on Men and the Media (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 53.

5. AP Research, "Radio News Listening Attitudes," (n.p.: Associated Press, n.d.).

6. Interview with M. Tomizawa, KYW Newsradio, Philadelphia, 1 June 1979.

7. J. Williams, "All News All the Time," Quill 66 (March 1978):21-26.

8. Interview with Tomizawa.

9. Arbitron Radio: Audience Estimates in the Arbitron Market of Philadelphia (Jan/Feb 1979) (Beltsville: Arbitron Co., 1979).

10. The source for most of this study's functions and function statements is the comprehensive review of uses and gratifications literature in E. Zietz, "The Development of a Method for Analyzing Perceptions of Network Prime-Time Television Series According to Selected Dramatic Elements, Program Attributes and Audience Needs" (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1980). Writings reviewed there include, among many others: E. Tate, "Mass Communication Research in Canada: Television and Adults," paper presented

to the International Communication Association, Philadelphia, 3 May 1979; W. McGuire, "Psychological Motives and Communication Gratification," in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, ed. J. Blumler and E. Katz (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974), pp. 167-196; J. Robinson, "Toward Defining the Functions of Television," in Television and Social Behavior, Reports & Papers, ed. E. Rubinstein, G. Comstock, and J. Murray, vol. 4: Television in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 568-603. For the present study Zietz's compilation was refined in light of such studies as: W. Elliott and C. Quattlebaum, "Similarities in Patterns of Media Use: A Cluster Analysis of Media Gratifications," Western Journal of Speech Communication 43 (1979):61-72; V. Trohldahl and R. Skolnik, "The Meanings People Have for Radio Today," Journal of Broadcasting 12 (1968):57-67.

11. Interview with B. Agnew, Bell Telephone Co. of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 20 June 1979.

12. J. Kim and C. Mueller, Factor Analysis: Statistical Methods and Practical Issues (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978), p. 70.

13. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Methodology and Scores of Socioeconomic Status, Working Paper No. 15, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963). The scores are based on average levels of income and education of male practitioners of the occupations rated. Occupational sociologists have shown that such ratings correlate highly with subjective ratings of occupational prestige (A. Reiss, with O. Duncan, P. Hatt, and C. North, Occupations and Social Status [Glenco: Free Press, 1961]) which are quite

stable over time (R. Hodge, P. Siegel, and P. Rossi, "Occupational Prestige in the United States: 1925-1963," American Journal of Sociology 70 [1964]:286-302). Hence even though the Bureau's ratings are based on 1960 census data they are useful in assessing subjects' SES levels.

14. 52.7% male-47.3% female (Arbitron Radio: Audience Estimates in the Arbitron Market of Philadelphia [Jan/Feb 1979]).

15. P. Blau and O. Duncan, The American Occupational Structure (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967).

16. It is reasonable to think that this study's results are generalizable. Trade press accounts suggest that programming at various all-news stations is much the same (S. Knoll, "Choice of Two in All-news," Variety, 4 December 1968, pp. 35; 49; R. Powers and J. Oppenheim, "The Failed Promise of All-news Radio," Columbia Journalism Review 12 [Sept/Oct 1973]:21-28; "The All-News Way of Radio Journalism," Broadcasting, 6 January 1975, pp. 36-42). Since virtually all-news radio outlets serve large urban markets, their audiences are probably demographically similar ("All-News Stations Continue Successfully, Primarily as a Large-Market Phenomenon," Television/Radio Age, 6 December 1976, pp. 42-43; 79-81).

17. W. McEwen and D. Hempel, "How Information Needs and Effort Affect Channel Choice," Journalism Quarterly 54 (1977):153.

18. R. Martin, J. McNelly, and F. Izcaray, "Is Media Exposure Unidimensional? A Socioeconomic Approach," Journalism Quarterly 53 (1976):621-622.

TABLE 1

FACTOR LOADINGS OF FUNCTION ITEMS[a]

Function (Mean; St. Dev.)[b]	I listen to KYW Newsradio...	Factor Loading
	1. Entertainment[c]	
Companionship (5.35; 3.06)	... because it keeps me company and gives me a feeling of companionship	.84
Relaxation (4.96; 3.02)	... because I find it relaxing	.60
Habit: to pass the time (4.57; 3.09)	... to help pass the time	.54
Escape (3.23; 2.66)	... to forget my own problems or responsibilities	.47
Habit: because it is a habit (6.02; 2.88)	... because it is a habit	.30
	2. Informational-social[d]	
Personal assertion (4.47; 2.70)	... because it helps me to understand myself and others	.61
Social utility: to be a good citizen (4.88; 2.56)	... to be a good citizen	.56
Social Utility: to plan daily activities (4.75; 3.01)	... to help plan my daily activities	.56
	3. Informational-personal[e]	
Learning: to get news quickly and concisely (8.08; 1.73)	... because I don't have to wait to get news quickly and concisely	.62
Social utility: to talk with friends and family (6,74; 2.29)	... so I can talk with friends and family about what I hear	.59
Learning: to keep informed (8.55; 1.32)	... to keep informed on events of the day day	.45
Excitement[f] (5.53; 2.70)	... because it is often exciting	.45

[a] N=196.
[b] Scale base: 1-9; the higher the mean, the greater the agreement.
[c] Eigenvalue, 3.89; percent of variance explained, 32.4.
[d] Eigenvalue, 1.48; percent of variance explained, 12.4.
[e] Eigenvalue, 1.08; percent of variance explained, 9.0.
[f] The loading of the excitement function on the informati nal-personal factor is theoretically unexpected.